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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: COLOMBO-COMMISSIONED POLL GIVES HIGH MARKS TO USG

1. In FY2002 Embassy Colombo commissioned an opinion poll to assess Sri Lankan public perceptions of USG policies regarding the peace process. The poll was performed by a local affiliate of A. G. Nielsen. Its findings were presented to a country team meeting convened on 10/24.

2. The poll focused on:

- general perceptions of the U.S. and other nations involved in the peace process
- levels of American involvement in the process
- the current U.S. role in the process
- expectations for the future

3. Findings.

3.1. General perceptions:

- Within both "conflict" (i.e., the North and East) and "non-conflict" areas, India is perceived as Sri Lanka's best friend in South Asia.
- Beyond South Asia, the U.S. is perceived in "non-conflict" areas as Sri Lanka's best friend, Norway by Sri Lankans living in "conflict" areas.
- The U.S. is seen as "moderately trustworthy" in both "conflict" and "non-conflict" areas.
- Norway and India excepted, the U.S. has been the most influential international player in Sri Lanka.
- The U.S. has no significant bias towards any Sri Lankan ethnic group.

3.2. Levels of U.S. involvement

- For Sri Lankans in both "conflict" and "non-conflict" areas, the U.S. "gives adequate attention" to Sri Lankan issues.
- "Non-conflict" Sri Lankans perceive the U.S. to be particularly involved in solving "the ethnic problem through mediation" and "improv[ing] the economy."
- "Conflict" Sri Lankans agree that the U.S. provides economic assistance, although "providing military ... assistance to fight the war" is more often cited. "Non-conflict" Sri Lankans would prefer that the U.S. continue its mediation efforts; for "conflict" Sri Lankans, additional economic assistance is a higher priority.

3.3. The USG and the current peace process

- "Conflict" and "non-conflict" Sri Lankans alike believe that the U.S. has influenced the LTTE to agree to the cease-fire and has been "involved in the monitoring process."
- They also give the U.S. high marks for "sincerity" and "honesty," although "conflict" Sri Lankans wonder about our "ulterior motives" while in "non-conflict" areas our national interests are occasionally questioned.

3.4. Expected Involvement in the current peace process

- 67 percent of "conflict" Sri Lankans and 48 percent of "non-conflict" Sri Lankans expect the U.S. to play a larger role in facilitating peace.
- In "non-conflict" areas it is hoped that American facilitation will bring both sides to the negotiating table, and influence the LTTE to "forego" some of its "hard demands."
- "Conflict" area Sri Lankans hope that the U.S. will "get more involved in the monitoring process."
- If the peace process succeeds, most Sri Lankans, particularly in the North and East, hope that the U.S.

will provide economic assistance to the country.

- Were the process to fail, "conflict" area Sri Lankans would expect the USG to mediate further "between the government and the LTTE to solve the problem through peace." "Non-conflict" area Sri Lankans would want the USG to respond with "military intervention," "military assistance," and funds to pursue a "full-fledged war against the LTTE."

14. The A. C. Nielsen presentation received by the country team on 10/24 has been sent via email to SA/PD. Full texts of the report are available at Embassy Colombo.

Wills